

CONIFEROUS FOREST VEGETATION COMMUNITY



In San Diego County, Coniferous Forest generally occurs *above an elevation of 3,500 feet* extending across the major mountain ranges of Palomar, Volcan, Hotsprings, Cuyamaca, and Laguna Mountains making up approximately 79,000 acres of the County. It generally grows in areas that receive more than 20 inches of rainfall each season including some snow. Coniferous Forest is identified by the presence of a number of species of pines including: Coulter with massive, spike covered cones, Jeffrey with a sweet smelling bark, Ponderosa with plate-like bark, and Sugar Pines with 5 needles in a bundle and long cones.

The red barked Incense cedar and the Christmas tree-like White fir also characterize it. However, to form a forest, these trees are commonly mixed with the deciduous California black oak, Canyon live oak, and Coast live oak. The Coniferous Forest in San Diego County is a remnant from a much more widespread forest that occurred in the area more than 10,000 years ago during the Pleistocene period. There has been some harvesting of timber in the past. It now forms mountain islands that were at one time connected together in a continuous swath of forest in the upper elevations of this County.

This vegetation habitat is very important for wildlife. When Coniferous Forest is preserved, many plant and animal species are protected too. Common birds that inhabit coniferous forest include: Stellar's jay, American robin, Western bluebird, Black headed grosbeak, Mountain chickadee, Plain titmouse and a variety of flycatchers. It is also important for mammals including Southern mule deer, bobcat, a wide variety of rodents and bat species. Reptiles in Coniferous Forest include Ring-necked snake, Mountain swift lizard and Mountain kingsnake. The brightly colored Large blotched salamander also occurs within this habitat.

Coniferous Forest in the central coastal portion of the County represents the Torrey Pine Woodlands in the Torrey Pines State Preserve. Coniferous Forest in the southwestern part of the County represents the Tecate Cypress Forest on Otay Mountain and Tecate Peak. Both the Torrey Pine Woodland and the Tecate Cypress Forest are *highly restrictive* and unusual vegetation communities and are associated with numerous rare species of plants.



Courtesy of the County of San Diego
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